1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

853 Breast-feeding begins on the third day, but if the milk does
[789] not come, the mother goes to a woman "specialist" who
[854] knows the herbs which are believed to induce the flow. When the mother is ill or tubercular, the infant is given to a wet-nurse. Once he has begun to nurse, he is fed whenever he cries, and as soon as he can sit up he is given the same food as
846 the mother eats. For the first two or three months after the
262 birth of her child a woman refrains from eating egg-plant, fresh fish — although she may eat salt fish — white beans or any others larger than Congo peas, pork, lard, and all fruit.
304 The ears of a female child are pierced when she is about a
30 month old for the gold ear-rings which are worn by girls and women of all ages. If the parents cannot afford them at the time, however, thread is placed in the holes until a sum sufficient to provide this important trinket has been accumulated.

856 A child is taught to sit up beginning with the end of the
854 third or fourth month, and by the time he is six or seven months old he can sit quite well; girls are believed to be more precocious than boys in acquiring this skill. When about ten months old, or sooner, an older sister, a little girl, or the father or mother takes the child by the hand and teaches him to walk, later allowing him to hold one end of a stick for sup-
[754] port. A child is never left alone, for fear of the evil eye or of
[789] werewolves, so that a mother does not even cross the threshold of her house without taking her baby with her, while if for some reason she cannot avoid leaving her child while she is in the yard, an empty bottle is placed near its pillow as a pro-
856 tective device. Teething is a matter of importance, since the
855 attitudes of the parents toward a child may be determined by
763 the first teeth to appear. If these are cut in the upper jaw, it is said that the child's mother will survive his father, and when this occurs, the mother takes every precaution to conceal the fact from her husband, so he will not hate the child. Others hold, however, that the appearance of an upper tooth first denotes that either the father or the mother is soon to die.*

856 Instruction starts early in the life of a child. Beginning with
861

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

days, according to the bocor's prescription. It is also employed to protect an individual against various forms of the ouanga.

Against poisons, the usual protection is the *drogue*, prepared by a bocor or a leaf doctor who specializes in such things. After having drunk a drogue, a man is regarded as immune to poison. Should a man be a "horse" of the loa Ogoun Balindjo, however, no drogue is necessary, for Balindjo's people are regarded as immune even without such precautions.

Foretelling the future and divination take two general forms. In one variety, a bocor or *divineur*, using ritual paraphernalia such as cards, flour, or ashes, takes personal responsibility for the divination. In the other form, the divineur functions only when possessed by a loa, and it is the deity himself who foretells and foresees. An account of this kind of divination is given in chapter 6, "Horses" of the loa Mâit' David when possessed are given packs of cards, for they are reputed to be able to divine the future.

Certain houngans use the instrument known as the *gembo* as a divining device. This is a small shell about the size of a lemon, through which a long cord is passed. When there is no tension on the cord, the shell can easily be slid back and forth. When the cord is taut, the shell will not slide. The houngan holds one end of the cord under his foot, the other end with his hand above it. He starts his divination with the shell at the top and the cord taut. Shaking his asson with the other hand, he talks *langage* and asks questions. To indicate a "yes" answer he relaxes the tension on the cord and the shell slips downward an inch or so. The typical gembo is decorated with beads, old coins, religious medals, snake bones, and a fragment of mirror.

There are several ceremonies for locating a thief or other guilty person. One is called *passage d'alliance*. A ring suspended on a string is held over a person's head. If it moves in a regular pendulous way, the person is innocent; but if it swings in a circle, his guilt is established. Another method is the use of a long stick. The stick is pointed at one man, then another, and when the end vibrates in a circular manner the guilty party has been located. This technique is known as *jugement de baguette*. A third method is the one known as *passé balai*. A man sits in a low chair and small branches and leaves of the *balai* (broom) tree are placed under the chair and fastened to its uprights. A guilty person sitting in this chair will cause the *balai* branches to vibrate and close in on him.

The role of the *docteur fè*—the leaf doctor—straddles the field of magic and pharmacology. Many of his potions are of a mystical and

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Many of his potions are of a mystical and semiritual nature; yet from roots and leaves he brews specific medicines for specific illnesses, such as rheumatism, fevers, malaria, worms, and yaws. Sometimes his cures are effective, sometimes they fail. The leaf doctor is consulted for poisons and their antidotes, though many poisons, such as that in the wari bean, may be gathered and dispensed by anyone.

One of the macabre figures in Haitian folk belief is the *zombie*. In the most general sense, the name designates the bland soul of a person who died without the distinction of having a loa in his head. The soul or spirit has no special will. It cannot affect the living in any way, unlike the lutin, the djablesse, and those who were buried possessed of mystéres. It does not harass enemies or importune its descendants. It is an undynamic, simple, otherworldly spirit, a sort of negative afterimage. It does not need to be placated or feared.

But the word *zombie* has another, more popular meaning, signifying a human being who has "died" and been resurrected from the graveyard by members of the Zeaubeaup Society, by a wicked sorcerer, or by some other person who has realized the "power" to perform this act.

The Haitian countryside is full of tales about fresh graves that have been robbed of their bodies by practitioners of this special form of black magic. By a secret formula these soulless "dead" are revived and given a semblance of life. They lack only the power of will. Without that, they are at the complete command of the sorcerer who has disinterred them. They are presumed to be spirited away and put to work at drudgery in some remote place. Stories are told of plantations in the mountains whose entire labor force is made up of zombies, the animated dead. You can tell a zombie when you see him. His eyes are dull and glazed, he gives no sign of recognition to people he once knew, he moves slowly and ploddingly at his tasks, and he takes orders only from his master. He neither sings nor dances, and he eats and drinks without interest. His facial expression never changes. He is emotionally and mentally dead. Neither the rites of the Church nor those of Vodoun can help him. There is only one formula for breaking the spell. If he eats salt he will either regain full life or die a merciful death. The master therefore takes great care that his zombies never have salt.

Haitians have many explanations of this mystical phenomenon. Some hold that the sorcerer has the unique power to revive the dead. Others believe that the victim is not really dead but has succumbed to a virulent poison which numbs all the senses and stops bodily functions but does not truly kill. Upon disinterment, the victim is given an antidote which restores most physical processes but leaves the mind in an inert state, without will or the power to resist.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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the struggle for independence, threw themselves against the formidable weapons of the whites. Whenever in spite of the drogue a man was wounded, there was always the explanation of other potent magic, never a surrender of the belief in drogues. Tradition has it that Christophe wore a drogue giving him immunity against all but silver bullets, and that he kept a silver bullet for suicide in case the need should arise—as it did. Drogues were worn by the caco guerrillas, active from 1919 to 1922, who harassed the Marines during the Occupation of the country.

Such forms of magic are found among practically every known folk. There are traces of charms in the folklore of most "civilized" people, as well as in actual, if secret, use by many apparent sophisticates.

The next commonest application of magic has to do with disease. Haiti is a poor and prevailingly illiterate country in which there are not enough trained medical doctors to serve adequately even the small population of the towns. People who live in the secluded valleys and on the mountainsides receive practically no medical attention. The disease rate if accurate figures could be obtained would certainly be shockingly high, with hookworm and malaria all but universal, and yaws, elephantiasis, and tuberculosis common. In the case of disease and its treatment, it is fair to say that the Haitian peasant is typically primitive.

Sickness is thought to be caused either as a punishment or a warning by one of the loa, or by evil magic wrought by one's enemies. When a man falls ill, therefore, he sends for the specialist, whether houngan, bocor, or caplata, to discover the responsible loa; next, he must learn whether the loa is angry with him, and if so, for what reason; if it is found that the loa is acting through magical compulsion of an enemy, the treatment of the disease will be different from the case of a loa acting without human compulsion. An angry spirit can be appeased by proper sacrifices; a spirit acting as an agent of evil magic must be fought by another spirit, compelled by the countermagic of the patient's specialist. Sometimes the countermagic is simple exorcism by spells and incantations. At other times it is highly involved and dangerous, requiring exotic plants, continuous attention, even illegal practices such as mutilating a corpse. Casual observation might fail to detect the magical element in some of the operations, for they resemble merely the brews or applications of old wives' tales.

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2. *Health*

Historians who seek to explain the rise and fall of nations in terms of a single cause might do worse than hit upon health and disease as the all-important explanation. Unless spectacular epidemics have appeared in a country's history, the average person is rarely aware of how diet may affect a people, or of how backwardness in achievement is often directly related to disease. It may well be that the development of *medical* history will yet cause a radical revision of certain philosophies of history.

"The diet of the Haitian peasants has not improved since the slavery period," says Dr. Camille Lhérisson.[5] When people are hungry in Haiti, they eat (if they can find food) until their hunger has been appeased; but what they eat, though it may fill their stomachs, is often decidedly deficient in the proper nourishment. Mangoes, yams, and beans are common enough so that few people actually go hungry; eggs, milk, meat, and many other essentials of a balanced diet, on the contrary, are scarce. People do not die of hunger, but rather of the diseases which accompany malnutrition. It is said that many peasants allow the fires in their homes to die out when the mangoes begin to ripen, subsisting almost wholly upon this fruit for weeks. One sees nearly naked children whose distended bellies are testimony to faulty diet. There are frequent cases of geophagy (eating of dirt) both by children and by adults in their unreasoned craving for certain dietetic elements; one result of the practice is the swallowing of eggs and larvae of intestinal parasites.

Scientific progress in medicine during the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth passed Haiti by completely. There were during the whole history of the country until 1915 hardly a score of reputable physicians; even had there been doctors, hospital facilities and equipment were lacking. Dr. Robert P. Parsons describes Haiti in 1915 as "an unspeakable hotbed of diseases, ranking second to none in the world in downright rottenness." He further described the "mass of three million people, sick, suffering beyond all power of words to describe, crippled, and weakened from the ravages of a host of diseases (for the most part preventable and curable), pitifully helpless and hopelessly resigned to their lot."[6]

5. "Diseases of the Peasants of Haiti," *American Journal of Public Health*, XXV, No. 8 (August, 1935), 924.
6. *History of Haitian Medicine* (New York, 1930), pp. 4–5.

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So it had been with the subject peoples of the island ever since its discovery. The Spaniards introduced a wide variety of European diseases to Española (an epidemic of smallpox in 1500 was estimated to have killed 200,000 Indians in the island) which did not disappear as the Indians gave way to Negroes. Three centuries of the slave trade brought blacks from many parts of Africa, and with them most of the deadliest plagues of that continent. During the flourishing days of French control over Saint-Domingue, Negro slaves were afflicted by a wide variety of diseases, the commonest being yaws, tetanus, intestinal worms, malaria, leprosy, smallpox, and scrofula, although others were certainly not absent. Only to yellow fever, probably brought with them from Africa, did the blacks seem to develop a certain immunity. Most plantations had a doctor in attendance, but medical skill during the eighteenth century was not advanced enough to cope successfully with scourges whose cause was then unknown.

After freedom there were fewer doctors than ever, less sanitation, and a worse diet. When a person was ill, his one alternative to suffering the disease to take its course was to consult the Vodun priest, for the commonly accepted explanation of disease was a spiritual one. If God (that is, the Christian God) had sent the illness, nothing could be done except to bear it, for God's will was unalterable; if it were the result of magic worked by some enemy, the identity of that enemy and the magical means used must be ferreted out so that countermagic might be employed. Vodun practitioners were, indeed, quite as important in their rôle of healing as in performing strictly religious rites. In the course of their efforts to cure disease they often stumbled upon homely but effective cures; no doubt also the mental effect of the patient's faith sometimes helped him to recover, even when the medicines administered had no specific value.

The "triple threat" to Haitian health is the morbid group: malaria, hookworm, and yaws. The first two are familiar enough in parts of the United States, and require only short comment. For centuries malaria has sapped the vitality of people in southern lands, giving them a reputation for indolence which is not wholly deserved. Haitian peasants were during the entire nineteenth century accused of laziness; when a strapping man lay all day in the shade of a tree, it was logical enough for a white visitor to suppose that he was willfully loafing. The critics might have been more temperate if they had known what it was to be perpetually full of malaria, with a body

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baby: when she does she substitutes a mode of feeding on fruits and solids which favors digestive disturbance and nutritive diseases in the infant.

At the age when children of the élite would be starting to school, peasant children are beginning work in the fields, hoeing, weeding, and carrying, always under the tropical sun. Cuts and bruises, sometimes serious, are improperly treated when they occur and so lead to tetanus or to enormous ulcers.

Hard work and a simple mode of outdoor life prove, in Haiti at least, not to be the keys to good health which a romantic might fancy them. Haiti has been one of the unhealthiest places in the world. One feels that it has been lucky to escape such scourges as typhus, cholera, and bubonic plague; that smallpox has not been violent in its epidemics, and that the people developed an immunity to yellow fever. It has, indeed, been luck rather than cleanliness and proper medical care which has protected the people in these instances.

In 1838 Boyer founded a hospital school at Port-au-Prince, giving it the name of The National School of Medicine. It did not function as a school, however, until 1860 when Geffrard reorganized it and gave it life. Geffrard also sent young men to Europe to study, installed laboratories of physics and chemistry in the upper schools of the capital, and made possible the appearance of an intellectual élite."[11] The next burst of energy in matters of hygiene came around 1890 when, under the influence of Dr. Léon Audain, the first health records were kept, and the spirit of scientific research reached Haitian medicine.

From 1804 to 1860, then, there was practically no proper care for sick people. In the latter years of the century a few trained physicians, with sadly deficient equipment, practiced in the towns. Not until after the Occupation was the rural mass of the population even touched by the medical knowledge which had been developing all over the civilized world for decades. Clinics, wholesale vaccinations and inoculations, and campaigns of enlightenment have in the past twenty years worked wonders. The Vodun practitioner, however, still is the "expert" who treats most illnesses, and healing remains one of his major functions.

11. Geffrard established schools of law, music, painting, and navigation. The latter two collapsed. The same president founded the high schools of Port-au-Prince, Jacmel, and Gonaïves.